

Message Text

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ACTION SCSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7317

INFO ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO VIA POUCH

UNCLAS MEXICO 11662

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC, MX

SUBJECT: MEDICAL CARE FOR AMERICAN PRISONERS

REF: A. MEXICO 11526, B. MEXICO 10125, C. MEXICO 8285

1. IN REF A EMBASSY REQUESTED THAT DEPARTMENT GIVE URGENT CONSIDERATION TO ASSIGNING THREE MEDICAL DOCTORS ON TDY TO THE EMBASSY FOR THE PURPOSE OF MONITORING THE MEDICAL CONDITION OF AMERICAN PRISONERS DURING THE PROPOSED HUNGER STRIKE. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, A MASSIVE HUNGER STRIKE WAS AVOIDED, ALTHOUGH SEVEN PRISONERS IN ACAPULCO RECOMMENCED AN INDEPENDENT STRIKE SEPTEMBER 9. THEREFORE, WE DO NOT NOW FORESEE THE NEED FOR THREE TDY PHYSICIANS FOR THE THREATENED EMERGENCY OF THE STRIKE.

2. THERE REMAINS, HOWEVER, THE SERIOUS AND CONTINUING PROBLEM OF OBTAINING ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE AND MEDICATIONS FOR AMERICAN PRISONERS IN MEXICO DISCUSSED IN REF B. AND C. PERHAPS THE MOST CONSTANT COMPLAINT OF AMERICAN PRISONERS HERE, ASIDE FROM PRISON DIET, IS THE ABSENCE OR LOW QUALITY OF MEDICAL CARE PROVIDED UNDER THE PRISON SYSTEM. IN THE WORST PRISONS, LITTLE OR NO MEDICAL CARE IS PROVIDED ON A REGULAR BASIS. IN THE BEST PRISONS, INCLUDING THE TWO NEW MODEL "RECLUSORIOS" IN MEXICO CITY, THE MEDICAL

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FACILITIES MAY BE MODERN, BUT THE PRISONERS COMPLAIN, THAT

THE STAFF ARE INCOMPETENT, CARELESS, OR COMPLETELY UNINTERESTED. MANY OF THE COMPLAINTS OF THE PRISONERS ARE EXAGGERATED OR INACCURATE. HOWEVER, CONSULAR OFFICERS HAVE VERIFIED ENOUGH COMPLAINTS OF QUESTIONABLE DIAGNOSIS OR PROCEDURE, INACTION OR SLOW RESPONSE TO MEDICAL EMERGENCIES, AND FAILURE TO TRANSFER PATIENTS TO ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED HOSPITALS, TO SHARE THE PRISONERS' DISTRUST OF THE PRISON MEDICAL STAFFS. HOWEVER, CONSULAR OFFICERS ARE NOT QUALIFIED TO JUDGE WHAT TYPE OF TREATMENT IS REQUIRED IN A CASE, NOR CAN THEY EFFECTIVELY QUESTION THE TREATMENT PRESCRIBED BY A PRISON DOCTOR. WITHOUT CALLING ON THE SERVICES OF A PRIVATE PHYSICIAN. FOR THIS PURPOSE THERE ARE NO FUNDS PROVIDED, NOR ARE PRIVATE PHYSICIANS ALWAYS WILLING TO QUESTION OPENLY THE JUDGEMENT OF THE PRISON DOCTOR.

3. THE EMBASSY AND CONSTITUENT POSTS ALSO HAVE FREQUENT NEED OF A PHYSICIAN TO VERIFY BY PHYSICAL EXAMINATION ALLEGATIONS OF MISTREATMENT AND TORTURE. CONSULAR OFFICERS ATTEMPT TO VERIFY ANY OBVIOUS PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF ABUSE, BUT THEIR STATEMENTS ARE CHALLENGED BY THE MEDICAL CERTIFICATE ISSUED BY THE PRISON PHYSICIAN UPON ADMISSION OF A NEW PRISONER, WHICH RARELY IF EVER MENTIONS BRUISES, OR OTHER EVIDENCE OF MISTREATMENT. IN THIS TYPE OF CASE, ALSO, THERE ARE NO FUNDS TO PAY PRIVATE PHYSICIANS AND MANY ARE RELUCTANT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN A CASE WHICH MAY RESULT IN UNPLEASANT REPERCUSSIONS FOR THEMSELVES, OR INVOLVEMENT AS WITNESS IN LATER PROCEEDINGS.

4. THE EMBASSY THEREFORE STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THAT THE DEPARTMENT SEEK THE MEANS TO PROVIDE THIS POST WITH A MEDICAL ADVISOR WHOSE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY WOULD BE TO ASSIST THE EMBASSY AND CONSTITUENT POSTS IN MONITORING THE HEALTH OF PRISONERS, IN DETERMINING THE ADEQUACY OF MEDICAL TREATMENT PROVIDED THE PRISONERS, AND EXAMINING ALL PRISONERS WHO ALLEGE MISTREATMENT TO CONFIRM EVIDENCE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE. WE BELIEVE THAT ONE DOCTOR COULD HANDLE THE MOST URGENT OR IMPORTANT PROBLEMS, AND PROVIDE GENERAL GUIDANCE TO CONSULAR OFFICERS THAT WOULD ENABLE THEM TO IMPROVE THEIR EFFORTS TO ASSIST PRISONERS WITH MEDICAL PROBLEMS. IF FEASIBLE, WE SUGGEST THAT THE DEPARTMENT

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ASSIGN ONE DOCTOR ON TDY TO SURVEY THE PROBLEM AND DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF THE NEED AND WHAT MIGHT REALISTICALLY BE ATTEMPTED. ON THE BASIS OF HIS FINDINGS, A MORE PERMANENT PROGRAM WOULD THEN BE DRAWN UP.

5. THE CONSUL GENERAL RAISED WITH THE UNDERSECRETARY OF GOVERNACION GARCIA RAMIREZ SEPTEMBER 8 THE SUGGESTION THAT DOCTORS ASSIGNED TO THE EMBASSY AS MEDICAL ADVISERS

WOULD BE HELPFUL IN CASE HUNGER STRIKE WERE EXTENDED. GARCIA RAMIREZ REACTED NEGATIVELY TO THE SUGGESTION, BOTH BECAUSE HE PREFERRED TO PLACE THE EMPHASIS ON BRINGING STRIKE TO AN EARLY END, AND BECAUSE HE THOUGHT THE PROPOSAL SENSITIVE, AND ONE WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE DISCUSSED IN ADVANCE WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY. HOWEVER, WE URGE DEPARTMENT TO GIVE THIS PROPOSAL URGENT AND SERIOUS STUDY, TO DETERMINE FEASIBILITY. IF IT APPEARS THAT THE ASSIGNMENT OF MEDICAL ADVISER COULD BE WORKED OUT ADMINISTRATIVELY, WE WILL RAISE THE PROPOSAL HERE SERIOUSLY WITH GOM.

6. THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD ALSO GRANT THE EMBASSY AN EMERGENCY DISCRETIONARY FUND OF \$5000 FOR USE BY THE MEDICAL ADVISER IN PAYING FOR NECESSARY MEDICAL SUPPLIES, LABORATORY FEES, OR THE SERVICES OF MEDICAL SPECIALISTS. THOMPSON

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